

THE LAYMAN

CLAUDIUS B. SPENCER, LL. D.

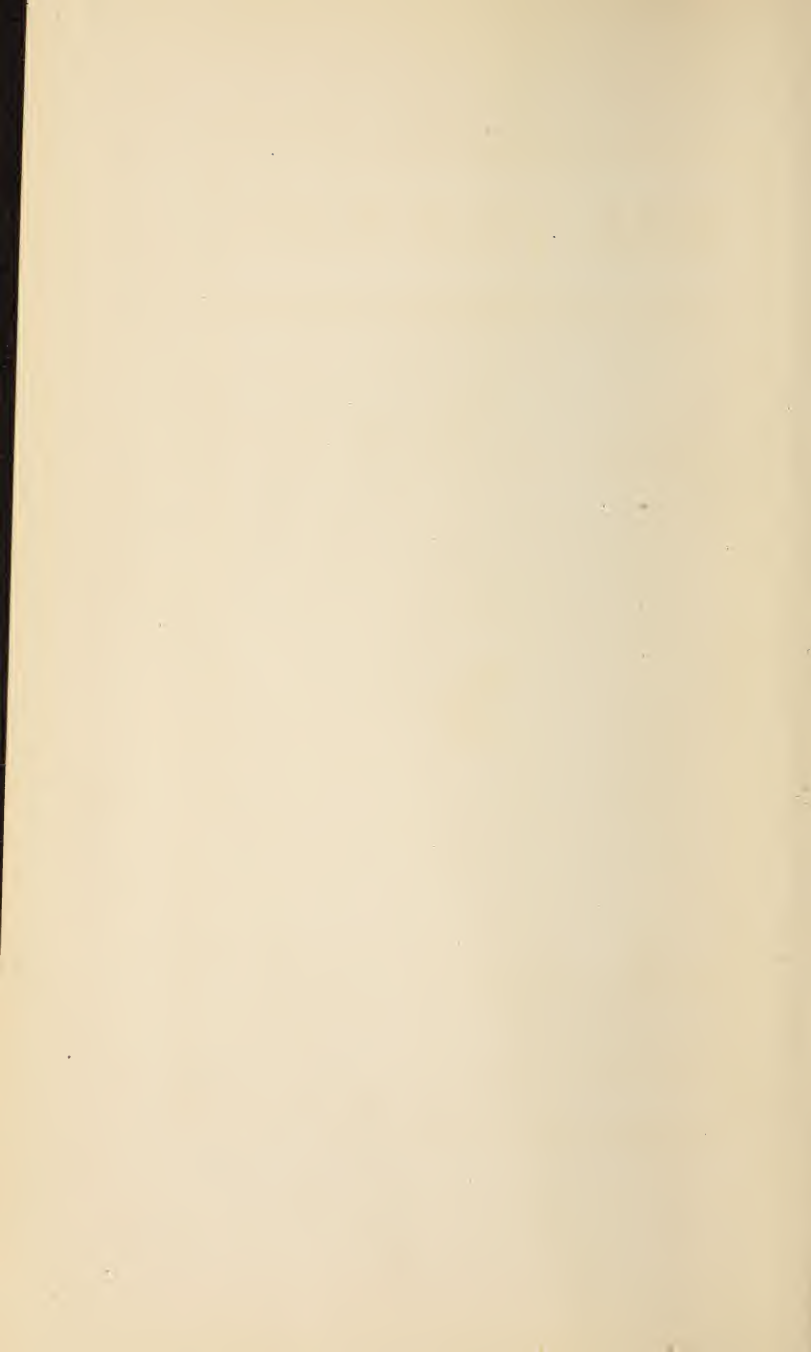


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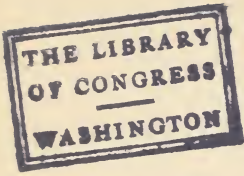
THE LAYMAN

By

CLAUDIUS B. SPENCER, LL. D.



CINCINNATI: JENNINGS AND GRAHAM
NEW YORK: EATON AND MAINS



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TO

The Laymen

WITH WHOM, DURING A QUARTER OF A CENTURY, IT
HAS BEEN MY HONOR AND HAPPINESS TO
LABOR, I WOULD BE HAPPY TO

Dedicate

THIS APPEAL FOR THEIR PROPER RECOGNITION.

PREFACE

THIS little book is scarcely more than a tract. It does not assume to be a treatise. It is an effort simply to bring together the questions involved in the discussion of the right and advantages of the lay participation in the Business Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Whilst authorities are not quoted for all statements, it will be found that the statements made are in accord with modern scholarship. The first chapter, for example, flows from such investigations as those of W. Robertson Smith and Maine; the second from the graphic pages of Hatch, Harnack, McGiffert, Westcott, and Rigg. In other chapters I have had the ad-

PREFACE

vantage of assistance from several friends in Great Britain and Ireland; from Bishop Carman and Chancellor Burwash in Canada; Bishops Hoss, Hendrix, Wilson, and Drs. Alexander, Ivey, and Snyder in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; and Chancellor Stephens in the Methodist Protestant Church. This by no means exhausts the list, but to these I am especially indebted.

The effort of this book is "not to destroy, but to fulfill;" to take the existing institutions of both ministerial and lay activity and co-ordinate them, weaving them, without the loss of a single vested power, into co-operation, and even union. It is a suggestion and a program by which there may at last be in very truth an ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE CHURCH.

*Central Christian Advocate,
Kansas City, April 2, 1912.*

C. B. S.

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The Layman

CHAPTER I

THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE LAITY

WHAT is a layman? As a matter of fact, is not the word used to indicate what a man is not, one who in a sense is outside the pale? If a question arises in medicine, the law, the sciences, the fine arts, the ministry, and a man professes that in the field under discussion he "is a layman," he professes at once also that in that field he does not assume to speak as an authority, that he wishes it understood that his opinion is in a sense discredited because he speaks from outside. It carries the implication of a certain inferiority.

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The layman? The word harks back to the word *λαός*, which, occurring not less than 1,500 times in the Septuagint, is the special title of God's chosen people as distinguished from the nations about them. The nations were "goyim," *ἔθνη*, "gentes," the world outside. The word is a choice word. It refers to a community, especially privileged and blessed; it refers to a covenant people, peculiarly endowed with access to God, peculiarly recognized as possessing a deposit of spirituality and favor which made them priests. The *λαοί* were "priests unto God."

In the beginning there was no specialized priesthood. In the morning of the world, in those ages when the cathedrals of humanity were the open sky, our Aryan fathers had no such

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classes as priest and layman. The father was the priest in his own house. In the early pre-Mosaic ages the father, the patriarch, was priest. The background of the Book of Job, a son of the desert, who feared God and worked righteousness, offering sacrifices every morning in his sons' families in succession, there, in the oases of the East, is the picture of the priesthood of the people in the earliest antiquity. Among the Semites outside the Hebrew community there never has been a specialized priesthood; and until long after the Conquest, a full thousand years and more after the call of Abraham, the structure of Hebrew society was quite similar to that of other Semitic tribes. "David's sons," says 2 Sam. 8:18, "were priests," which scholars

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regard as a perpetuation of the old household priesthoods. And as for the laity, the *λαός*, the great names of Israel, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, none of whom were of any distinctively priestly class, did not hesitate to speak as the oracles of God, approaching Him and becoming His mouthpiece. "Samuel, who was not a priest, nor even a Levite, performed every function of a priest all his life long." When the temple is dedicated, Solomon, the king, "is the one predominant figure, and the high priest is not once mentioned." There is no ground in the Old Testament for any theory that the ministry is a privileged class, invested with any exclusive right to declare the counsels of God, whether as to personal holi-

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ness or as to the policy or polity of the theocracy. The people were the royal priesthood; they were individually "priests" and "kings." And from the people, and not from the priestly line, from him who had been the shepherd of the Bethlehem hills, and whom God had exalted to be at once king over united Israel and the singer of its Psalms, the liturgy of believers through all time, came in due time Jesus Christ, King of kings and the one final priestly sacrifice.

It is somewhat apart from our object in this little book, and yet it may be worth while to note the priesthood of the laity as developed in the New Testament Church. It was predicted as if it were fundamental in the New Dispensation that the Spirit should be poured upon all flesh, upon the peo-

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ple as a whole. And at Pentecost that promise was fulfilled. Says Bishop Westcott:

“The gift of Pentecost was a common gift. It was the endowment of a body representative of all believers. In this the gift of the Spirit was not for the Apostles alone, or for any one class, but for all who had embraced the message of the resurrection. It is our inheritance as Christians, and we need to remember that it is the inheritance of all, to be administered by all.”

Proceeding, this great churchman and scholar upbraids the National Church of England for her remissness in summoning her laity to their duties as preachers. “We have not pressed upon them boldly enough,” he exclaims, “the duty of prophetic ministry. We have not charged them to

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stir up the grace that is in them.” He declares that the Church can not fulfill her duty until every Churchman is such a worker. In consequence the great National Church is “in danger from what is called ‘the slow suicide of idleness.’ ” Dilating still farther he again confesses of the National Church, “She has wronged the brotherhood and wronged the world.” “Yet,” he exclaims, “God has promised to pour forth His Spirit on all flesh, and your young men shall see visions—visions which shall bring back a lost glory to the earth. And your old men shall dream dreams—dreams which are the foreshadowings of that better order of things which God hath prepared for us.”

Would to God that the Methodist Episcopal Church would lay these

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things to heart! Would to God that in a time when the harvest is so plentiful, when humanity is so at sea, when the gods of gold tremble in their shrines because they have become nauseating to the rich and hated by the poor, when the multitudes have none too kindly a feeling towards the Churches, and are bewildered and hungry hearted, would to God that Methodism might once more in this land avail herself of her inherited resources in her lay priesthood, her lay ministry, those upon whom the new Pentecost would come, but who are now doing so little because so little is required of them! "The power of Pentecost," exclaims this same saintly bishop of the Durham Cathedral, "is still unexhausted. The wind fell: the flames died away: the

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voices ceased: but a life was quickened—a Church was sent forth conquering and to conquer.”

Tolerate yet another word. John Wesley used to point out that our Lord was a layman: “Is not this the carpenter?” He recalled with gratitude the Moravian mechanic and lay preacher, Christian David, who at Herrnhut had been as an angel of God to him, albeit he, Wesley, was an Oxford Brahmin and in orders. John Wesley has been called the St. Francis of the eighteenth century. Each summoned the laity. “The Methodist, like the Friar Minor, took the world as his parish;” and the lay preacher was the herald. Each “planted himself in the crowded cities and among the outcast populations;” and the humble lay worker was his

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right hand. "With due allowance for the differences of the time, the methods as well as the objects of Wesley were singularly like those of St. Francis." There was a similar renunciation, a similar use of hymns,—similar obstacles, sneers, dislike, trials. Both went to those who needed them most. Both used field preaching. Both preached perfection. But the point that moves us most in this connection is that the early preachers of both Francis and Wesley were laymen. And Francis retained his appeal to and for the laity till the end. Till this day those Franciscans who are in orders and the lay brothers wear precisely similar habits to show to each other and to the world that their equality is identical. Unquestionably we are suffer-

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ing because lay preaching, lay evangelism, lay class leaders, are so unused—one might say, disparaged.

When we recall what laymen have done as preachers, Samuel Drew, William Carvosso, William Dawson, Thomas Thompson, Philip Embury, Captain Webb, of the early time,

“Meek, simple followers of the Lamb,
They lived, and spoke, and thought the
 same,
They joyfully combined to raise
Their ceaseless sacrifice of praise;”

when we recall the mighty lay evangelists who, in spite of the unscriptural prejudice against them, have appeared from time to time, who can fail to cry aloud to God that He, even He, would let burst a new Pentecost upon “all flesh” once more—that Methodism may not waste away

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through “the slow suicide of idleness?” For, God be thanked! whatever we of this day may do or fail in the doing, there will remain among the resident forces of Methodism her doctrine of the priesthood of the laity: and this fact is the guarantee that, as the acorn under favorable conditions one day comes to its own in the oak, under favorable conditions this Scriptural and essential co-partnership of the laity will come to their own in their recognition in both the legislation and the business management of the Church.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

THE government of the Early Church was not committed to ecclesiastics. On the contrary, the apostles themselves did not have any official position either in the local Church or in the Church at large. They were missionaries, itinerants, witnesses of the resurrection, declaring what they had seen as companions of the Savior, and preaching with power from on high. They did not hold any office in Jerusalem, nor is there any proof that they were office-holders in the Church at large. They had a vast power, but, as it were, no technical powers. They met in the councils and

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local communities, they took part in the debates and voted on pending questions, but there was no hierarchy clothed with powers unshared by the people. St. James, the Lord's brother, took part in the Council at Jerusalem, but the letter from the Council to the Gentile Christians in Antioch was sent not by the hierarchy, but by the Apostles, the elders, and "the whole Church." Indeed, St. James, the Lord's brother, was probably not one of the Twelve; being therefore on the outside of the apostolic college, he himself is the definitive proof that there was no supermundane and intrinsic prerogative which invested even the apostles with a right to rule which might not be possessed by the elders, yet by the people themselves.

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The point is worth a moment's reflection. The Twelve possessed the greatest influence. They had been the Savior's companions while He tabernacled among us; they had walked with Him through the villages; with Him they had sat down on the mountainside; they had seen His gracious miracles; they had received instruction from His lips. They were therefore in the nature of things charged with a heavier responsibility than other disciples; but they were not charged with the rule of the Church. So far as the New Testament is concerned, it is a dogmatic and unsupported assumption to claim that there is any divine right of the ministry to rule the Church. The apostles did possess the highest function in the Church, but it was

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spiritual; they were the recipients of the highest consideration, but it was the reverence we pay to holiness and its message first hand from the lips of Christ. They owed their distinction and their influence not to any temporal power, not to any throne of office in any local congregation or in the Christian community at large; they owed whatever honor and authority they possessed to a spiritual commission, to the fact that they had been the comrades of the Savior, that they had heard the blessed words that fell from His lips, and were witnesses and missionaries of His death, His resurrection, and His ascension to the right hand of God on high. The real authority of the apostles is the authority of the minister still, not any sole and jealously guarded preroga-

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tive to rule; they possessed that which transcended all man-made distinctions, soaring aloft to the throne of God whence they returned to speak as witnesses of that which has already been spoken to them by the Spirit.

The same summary holds good both of the "prophets" and of the "teachers" in the classic passage in 1 Cor. xii: 28, written to the disciples in the great city where Paul had labored for well-nigh two years. The "prophets" and "teachers" were held in high honor and they spoke with authority and power; but they, neither of them, held any distinctive office in the temporalities of the Churches. In the young community they took their place with the disciples, so far as we have any clue. Immediately after Pentecost, "when the number of dis-

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ciples was multiplying," "the Twelve called the multitude of disciples together" and called upon them to select the deacons to manage the business of the little but growing community. "And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen."

In his unanswered monographs Hatch has shown that the laity and the clergy had interblending powers in the machinery of the Early Church. He tells us that "the whole body of Christians was upon a level: 'All ye are brethren.' " The distinctions which St. Paul makes between Christians are based not upon office, but upon varieties of spiritual power. The laymen were preachers. One of the most interesting monuments of the second century, Hatch reminds us, consists

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of a sermon or homily which was preached by a layman at Rome, a fragment of which has long been known as the Second Epistle of Clement. This is but one illustration.

As time passed the organization of the Christian community was necessary; and here the customs of the times came into play. The communal idea pervaded not only Palestine, but survived in the Græco-Roman world. Rome, Athens, Sparta, the West were municipalities governed by committees—committees of officers. The Christian communities took on the same shape. The committees, the “older men,” hence the presbyters, οἱ πρεσβύτεροι, came to supervise and to rule the company of disciples. They visited the sick, provided for the orphans and widows, turned back those

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who had gone astray, sat in merciful judgment on those who had committed a wrong. They met in a place which came to be called a *basilica* or courthouse, and their tasks were mainly those of discipline.

This, too, passed. The state of society changed. The episcopacy was evolved. The ruling power of the clergy was increased. The very name pastor—which comes from “the shepherd life of Eastern and Southern Palestine, where a shepherd wandered with his flocks of almost innumerable sheep over almost boundless tracts of moorland”—carried with it the idea of ruling. The pastor as a good shepherd safeguarded his flock, cared for the broken, repressed the headstrong, sought those who had strayed away from the flock. Thus the idea of the

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pastor grew into the idea of ruling and of feeding. Little by little the laity, so to say, were excluded from ecclesiastical functions, and these in turn came to mean the entire spiritual and temporal administration of the Church. At first a layman might not preach if a bishop were present, says Hatch: and then not if any Church officer was present: and finally not at all. At first the vote of laymen as well as the nascent clergy was taken in cases of discipline; finally the laymen had no place whatever in ecclesiastical matters. It was carried so far that a close screen was put up so as to completely shut out the laity even from seeing the altar. It did not take long for the clergy to grasp the temporal oversight, or for powerful personalities to develop the historic

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episcopate. The Church blended the theory of spiritual dominion, as a part of the Kingdom of God on earth, with the powers, also ordained of God, which had the rule over His temporal estate. Hence arose the fundamental principles of the unity of Church and State, in the Catholic ideal, the Church over all and the hierarchy over the Church, towering over them all rising the Pontifex Maximus, the spiritual and temporal Cæsar, the august Bishop of Rome. It was but the natural application of this principle that there should develop the making of great temporal lords wearing the crimson of hierarchical distinction, statesmen cardinals,—such mighty names as Cardinals Consalvi, Wolsey, and Richelieu; such popes as Leo and Hildebrand. Even yet the Cæsar

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by the Tiber dreams of a return of temporal power; it is fundamental to the right of the clergy to rule. At the same time we must bear in mind, as a proof of the essential right of the laity to participate in the business government of the Church; the fact that in the scheme of the Catholic machine a layman may become a cardinal, and that laymen are cardinals to-day. Moreover, nothing in the remarkable rule the present pontiff, Pius X, is giving the Catholic world has aroused our interest more than his edicts stripping the parish clergy of their well-known power to rule in the temporalities of their institutions and parishes, and investing that prerogative again in the laity, the pope cutting these historic powers away from the clergy under the pro-

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fession that he would “restore all things” to the apostolic ideal.

At the same time it seems evident that the apostolic brotherhood—that is to say, the clergy, to use the vernacular of the present day—were charged with the “word of God” and with the two sacraments. To them was committed the custody of the “word of God.” “It is not fit,” they said, “that we should forsake the word of God to serve tables;” therefore, that they might continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the Word “by the suffrages of all the company, or infant Church, there were chosen seven men “appointed over the business.” This invests the “ministry of the Word,” the choice, the ordination, the character, the discipline, the appointment, of the “min-

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isters of the Word'' in the successors of the acknowledged ''ministers of the Word'' till this day. The regulation or oversight of the ministry is not a function of lay power. That the Methodist Episcopal Church has ever recognized. And we trust that principle will never be invaded by any rash and intrusive presumption until the end of time.

To what end then have we come? Is it not to the fact that there is no Scriptural warrant for the assumption that the ministry, as a class, have the exclusive right either to rule the Church, or to dictate the business of the Church? that it is an unwarrantable and somewhat uncomplimentary assumption that the clergy either have the right to seize and appropriate the dictation of the business of the

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Church, or that, through the action of historic forces, possessing that power, they should regard it, at least from the New Testament standpoint, as a presumption and an intrusion on the part of the laity, if the latter, in this land of representative institutions, venture to believe they, too, should have some part in directing the Church's business? that in the passing of resolutions, in the voting of levies, in the fixing of institutions, in the progressive programs for the successive conference years, the laymen should have some voice?

Have we not learned that from the standpoint of the New Testament—as well as the Old—that the seat of prestige and authority on the part of the ministry is a spiritual prestige and authority? The vivid pages of Har-

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nack, Hatch, McGiffert, Ramsay, make all this as clear as noon. In this, moreover, the fact of the New Testament and the fundamental laws of psychology as we now understand them are in perfect accord. Nor can we think of any worse blow that could in these times be struck the real influence of any spiritual ministry than to have that ministry give it out as a finality that it intends to hug to itself any powers placed by past ages in its hands, simply and solely because those powers are in its hands. "Let him get who can: let him keep who holds" is scarcely the theme of a spiritual ministry. Christ not Pilate is the ministerial ideal; not the rule of force, but the rule of vicarious love. However, the assumption is false. Our ministry never has based its te-

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nacity at any point on the right of possession. The ministry accepts the doctrine that we are one in Christ and members one of another. It showed its readiness to lay down its historic exclusive right to rule, when it became clear that that was just. It went in advance of the laity in this. It has the same attitude towards the principle of justice to-day.

CHAPTER III

METHODISM IN AMERICA

ONE is surprised, perhaps, to discover that the early Conferences held by the Methodist preachers on the continent of America were not called "Conferences" but "Conversations." The full title of the first Conference Minutes, as disclosed by the ancient volume in our hand as we write this line, is "Minutes of Some Conversations between the Preachers in Connexion with the Reverend Mr. John Wesley, Philadelphia, June, 1773." Five "Questions" only were considered: (1) Fealty to Mr. Wesley; (2) the doctrine and discipline as prescribed in the Wesleyan standard;

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(3) The exclusion of such preachers as deviated from that standard—the “Rules” pursuant to that standard being laid down in six paragraphs; (4) “How are the preachers stationed?” (there were ten); (5) “What numbers are there in the Society?” The year following, the “Questions” included the passing of the character of the preachers, “Who are admitted on trial?” “Who are admitted?” “How are the preachers stationed?” the statistics; and certain rules as to the support of the preacher, the preacher’s horse, and the taking of a “general collection” at Easter.

An old print of that first Conference shows ten men, all clerically garbed, all Europeans. No layman seems to be present. And yet, what would Methodism in these colonies

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have been but for such, for example, as “Philip Embury, Schoolmaster,” and Robert Strawbridge going in every direction, and “wherever he went he raised up preachers,” “wherever he preached sinners were converted.” These were laymen. And yet when the societies met in Conference, no layman was allowed to utter a word.

The key to all this is found in the first two questions of that first Conference:

1. Ought not the authority of Mr. Wesley and that (British) Conference to extend to the Preachers and people in America as well as in Great Britain and Ireland? Answer, Yes.”

2. Ought not the doctrine and Discipline of the Methodists, as contained in the Minutes, to be the sole rule of our conduct, who labor in the con-

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nexion with Mr. Wesley in America? Answer, Yes.”

It is then a question as to the attitude of Mr. Wesley towards lay participation in the business of the Connexion; and this we know was so hostile that he would allow them no voice whatever. This hostility increased, if possible, with his years. January 13, 1790, he wrote to John Mason, “As long as I live, the people shall have no power in choosing either stewards or leaders among the Methodists”—that is to say, in the management even of the common business matters of their local societies; “we are no republicans and never intend to be.” How would it be as regards laymen in the Annual Conference, when this was the ecclesiastical system? There can be but one answer.

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It is not to be understood that this was satisfying to the people of the young Republic. Had not the Revolution, champion of representative institutions, destroyed the absolutist principle in this hemisphere? Laymen continued to be used in all manner of spiritual work; they conducted revivals, led classes, contributed to the building of the denomination; but when they approached the Conference the portcullis was down and the wall was defended by absolute prerogative. The people complained. Before there was yet any General Conference (1792) the fathers in the ministry as well as in the laity strenuously complained. By 1791 there was a formidable schism, and by 1792 the secessions began which were to tear out of the Methodist Episcopal Church not

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a few of its choicest souls. The early part of the last century witnessed the appeal of the people, ministerial and lay, for lay participation in the legislation and business of the Church. By 1816 the local preachers asked for representation; in 1821 the laity pressed their case. In 1822 the *Wesleyan Repository* was founded in Philadelphia for agitating the cause; in 1824 a society was organized for the same purpose; in the same year a newspaper was founded to agitate its claim; in 1826 a petition was circulated through the Church praying the General Conference, to meet in 1828, to concede the right; and in 1827 a convention was called to further memorialize the General Conference then due in a few months.

The General Conference of 1828

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adopted a report submitted by John Emory, that, inasmuch as the ministry is “divinely *called*” to preach, it must be responsible to God for its ministrations, and must, therefore, have a divine right to control them, without authoritative interference from the laity; in other words, a divine right to govern the Church.

This statement, summarized by Dr. Abel Stevens, which was looked upon as unanswerable, shows a monstrous confusion; it denies the essential priesthood of the entire body of Christ; it denies the construction of the apostolic Church; it is the foundation stone of the papal system. It failed to separate between the spiritual functions of the prophetic and apostolic ministry, and the “serving of tables.” It could not endure. It

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was destined after long years of struggle to be shattered to fragments; albeit the triumph of what seems to be justice and expediency, as well as the fundamental allegiance to the apostolic ideal of the holiness and the community of privilege of all believers, seems not yet fully come.

However, these latter paragraphs are somewhat outside the purpose of this chapter. We are here aiming at summoning back the portrait of the Conference during a period when as yet there was no General Conference. It was a period when the Wesleyan movement had for all this land but ten preachers. They and their later colleagues and successors, as Dr. Abel Stevens said, were the "evangelical cavalry," of whom Professor Tipple with dramatic burst has character-

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ized: "In every chapter [of Stevens's *History of American Methodism*] you feel the rush and haste of the restless men who were commissioned to herald the good tidings. . . . 'Rapid advance of the Church,' 'Methodism enters Kentucky,' 'Garrettson pioneers Methodism up the Hudson,' 'Asbury itinerating in the South,' 'McKendree goes to the West,' 'Colbert in the wilderness,' 'the itinerants among the Holston Mountains,' 'Philip Gatch appears in the north-west territory,' 'Robert Hubbard drowned in the St. Lawrence,' " etc., etc.

What does this mean? It can only mean that the real work of evangelization of this new world was in large part the work of laymen, the local preachers who without hope of earthly reward took their place as preachers,

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whilst these few itinerating members of the Conference were blazing the way, fording the streams, sleeping on the ground, pushing onward, restlessly ever onward, seeking the scattered sheep, organizing them into classes, setting over them lay preachers, and returning after an absence of weeks, if not months, to receive an accounting and to establish more firmly the faith of the societies.

It seems strange, looking back across the generations from 1773 until the General Conference of 1912, that in the practical business of the Conference these laymen, entrusted with the spiritual life of the Church, the patrons of its press, the builders of its schools, the supporters of its benevolences, should be allowed no part. As the quadrenniums passed, after

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stormy debates, much bitterness, several defections and forming of new denominations, the doors of the General Conference were opened to them: but it seems more strange that, when that is done, the doors of that particular Conference which transacts the business of the local, and, as it were, federated, societies, which decides the attitude of the Church on local issues, which, in short, deals with the identical matters in which the laymen have a direct, personal, non-transferable, interest should in this late day keep its bars up full in the laymen's face. "No other great ecclesiastical body of the New World, except the Romanists," says Dr. Abel Stevens, "retained an exclusively clerical system of government."

CHAPTER IV

THE STRUGGLE IN GREAT BRITAIN

THE struggle for the recognition of the laity in Methodist bodies is interesting, and a rapid sketch of it may be not without profit in this quest for a platform on which to stand with reference to the subject of this little book.

It so happens that at the very first Conference held by Mr. Wesley, at the Foundry, London, June 25, 1774, consisted of the two Wesleys, four clergymen, and four laymen. It was at this Conference that the doctrinal foundations of Methodism were formulated, and certain rules as regards

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polity adopted. It was decided by this Conference, for example, that "wherever they preached they ought to endeavor to form societies; that the Methodists should be divided into four sections, namely, the united societies, the bands, the select societies, and the penitents;" rules for the united societies, the bands, the select societies and the penitents were fixed; field preaching was approved; rules for class leaders were adopted; and a long series of other regulations were adopted. They did not elaborate on ecclesiastical structure, to be sure, for the simple reason that inasmuch as the preachers and the people were, and were intended to remain, members of the Established Church, no such structure was required.

The Second Conference, which met

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in Bristol, August 1, 1745, had the Wesleys, one clergyman, six lay preachers, and one who was not a preacher at all, Mr. Marmaduke Gwynne, afterwards the father-in-law of Charles Wesley. Two days were spent in reviewing the doctrinal foundations. The third day the Conference took up the matter of Church government. The question was asked: "Is Episcopal, presbyterian, or independent Church government most agreeable to reason?" Thus at the first laymen appeared in the councils of the Methodist movement.

It must be said, however, that the presence of these laymen did not imply that they were clothed with actual legislative powers. They did not possess them. In its last resort no one was invested with this power save

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Mr. Wesley himself. He was dominated by one principle, from which he never stepped aside, namely, his imperial autocracy. He argued that, inasmuch as he had originated the Methodist movement, and power had by circumstances providentially been thrust upon him, he could not divest himself of it. He therefore governed the societies; and until he drew his last breath he retained his absolutism. As to this irresponsible rule, he said: "None needs submit to it unless he will. Every preacher and every member may leave when he pleases."

As to the laity, as he grew in years he grew more inflexible that, touching the real administration of the work, the laity should never have any power anywhere, either in its Conference or in the local Society. Only a year be-

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fore his death (January 13, 1790) he wrote to John Mason: "As long as I live, the people shall have no power in choosing either stewards or leaders among the Methodists. . . . We are no republicans, and never intend to be." This piece of absolutism was destined to be shattered to pieces. But during his life, churchman that he was—possessing an organizing ability equal to that of Richelieu, denying himself everything as if he himself were a Carthusian monk, in an appropriated abbey of which order (the Charterhouse School), he had been educated, calling his followers to no self-denial and no consecration he did not exemplify, whether in Georgia or flying to and fro in Britain, he was so constituted that he could but rule, albeit he sought it not for his own sake,

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but as an initiatory organism for the spread of evangelical religion. And certainly the work he did justified his general proposition; for his work saved England from the terrors of the French Revolution, and gave Protestantism its model and challenge for world-wide evangelism. Constructed as he was, animated by the principles that were his passion, believing in his mission, he felt he could but keep the scepter in his own fingers. Dr. Beaumont compared him to a boatman on the Thames, with his eyes fixed on St. Paul's Cathedral, while every stroke of his oars drove him further away from it. Among other things this republican, or representative, conception of the movement which he forbade was destined to be shattered also. It was only

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brought about after a truly terrible struggle, involving the secession and formation of new Methodist bodies.

On this rock of the rights of the laity to representation in the Church, the Methodist bark was to strike time and again. In 1797 the Methodist New Connexion struck from the parent body because of the refusal to provide "lay representation." Dr. Coke himself, in 1792, moved the expulsion of Kilham, like Wesley, born in Epworth, and one of the most brilliant writers and beautiful characters the Methodist movement has produced. He was the prophet of the Methodist New Connexion. Trouble over it all brought him to the grave in less than three years.

The Primitive Methodists broke off

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and in 1820 organized a Church having lay participation as one of its principles. It has in its fold scholars and evangelists, and at the last Ecumenical, Toronto, October, 1911, gave a good account of itself at every point. The Bible Christians had a history stranger than fiction. It was the spontaneous child of spiritual crises, the longing for souls, which grew into a movement—an expulsion—and a Church. It too had as a fundamental principle, laymen along side the preachers in the Conferences. There were other schisms, in which the Wesleyan body lost 100,000 members not inferior to any. We write it with pain, but it is past; and now there is concord, but it is necessary to state the fact to understand what lay participation in the business of Metho-

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dism has cost. In the process of time three of these amalgamated, so to-day there are but three considerable Methodist bodies in Great Britain, with two minor organizations having each less than 9,000 members.

The struggle in the Wesleyan body may be judged from the foregoing paragraph. Lay representation was not only contested by the great Jabez Bunting and his party: it was fought; it was persecuted. But the tide could not be permanently checked. In 1878, eighty-seven years after Wesley's death, the struggle for lay representation in the Conference swept over its barriers and became a fact.

At the present time the Representative Session, consisting of ministers and laymen, attend to business under the following heads:

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(a) Time and place for holding the next Conference.

(b) Official apportionments, deputations, and delegations.

(c) Home and Foreign Missionary Deputations.

(d) Nomination to Departmental Deputations.

(e) Committees on Privileges and Exigency.

(f) Foreign Missions.

(g) Schools.

(h) Chapel Affairs (England, Scotland, Wales).

(i) The Children's Fund.

(j) Home Missions: (1) General; (2) Army and Navy; (3) Seamen's; (4) London Mission, etc.

(k) Worn-out ministers and widows.

(l) Theological Institutions.

(m) Education: Sunday School Union, etc.

(n) Higher education.

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- (o) Observance of the Lord's Day.
- (p) Extension of Methodism in Great Britain.
- (q) Temperance,
and all matters relating to
- (r) District Sustentation Funds.
- (s) Alterations of circuits and districts against which there is any appeal.
- (t) All matters affecting the financial or general affairs of the Connexion.

These subjects are amplified in the Constitution and Polity of the Connexion, carefully safeguarding the rights of the Representative Conference.

There is also a Conference of ministers held at the same place and time but distinct from the Representative Conference, to which all questions of ministerial character, ability, and dis-

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cipline, all questions of appointments, "Pastoral Address," public worship, connectional literature, and pastoral supervision are by the Constitution referred.

In Ireland Mr. Wesley held the scepter as in England. Both he and his brother Charles preached in Ireland. The principles of ecclesiasticism have continued identical. Before and after Wesley's death the Irish Conference sustained an organic relation to the British Wesleyan body; that relation it sustains to-day. Up till the year 1876 the Irish Conference consisted exclusively of ministers in full connexion. In 1876, without the previous parturition labors through which the mother Church across the Channel had passed, the Conference provided for the participation of lay-

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men in the business of the Conference. As in England, there are two sessions of the Conference, the Representative and the Ministerial. The business of the Representative Session is quite identical with the Representative Session of the British Wesleyan Conference. The business of the Ministerial Session includes all matters relating to the admission of candidates, ministerial character, appeals on matters of Discipline, supernumerary preachers, and appointments.

As in the case of the British Wesleyan Connexion, this participation and division works well. It is representative, democratic, and yet preserves to the ministry every prerogative essential to its independence, its self-respect, and its usefulness.

CHAPTER V

THE ENTRANCE OF THE LAITY

IF among Christian communities there is any organized body in whose business councils the presence of the laity ought not only to be welcome, but solicited, it would seem that the Methodist movement ought to furnish that body. Methodism itself is the product of lay activity. It is almost fifty years since Bishop Simpson, seeking a foundation for his intense plea for lay representation, drew this picture of our origins:

“Methodism was from its beginning and is in its nature, the uprising and development of lay influence. What were the laity in the Churches

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prior to Mr. Wesley's great movement in England? I speak of the English Churches. What did they do? What part did they take? The minister conducted the services. There were no Church officers in the sense of our modern Church officers to exercise anything like spiritual functions. Mr. Wesley's great movement called lay influence into exercise in the Church. Class-leaders were appointed, stewards were called into action, exhorters were licensed, local preachers were selected, and there came up out of the ranks of the Church a body of laymen to spread personal holiness through the Church. And what was the nature of the attack made on Methodism? It was attacked on this very ground—that it was profaning holy things; that it was calling laymen to the exercise of ecclesiastical functions—and if you read the records of those times, and the history of the

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contests of those times, you will find that Wesley and the early Methodists were charged with this special crime of intruding men into the sacred office who were unfit for the position, and of giving to laymen a part of the conduct of ecclesiastical affairs.

“Methodism not only did this, but it came to the people teaching every man to work. It called upon men to pray; it called upon the women to speak; and long before the days when women’s rights were talked about, Mr. Wesley had our mothers talking in the prayer-meetings and in the class-meetings, many of them becoming burning and shining lights in the Church. And, sir, I believe there is many a man among us who owes much of what he is to the fact that his mother had learned to talk in the Methodist Church. Methodism is, in its essential action, an uprising of the popular element. Wesley selected

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many of his preachers from laymen. He called them to go and preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. He gathered those preachers around him, and he counseled with them in reference to carrying out his great work. So much for the usages of the Church.”

Methodism was, as Bishop Simpson said, in its essential genius an uprising of the people—not only as a response to its message, but as the force by which it was carried forward with such astonishing strides. In this country it was the lay preacher that was the apostle to the wilderness and to the town; Philip Embury, the Palatine schoolmaster; Captain Webb, in his scarlet coat and gold braid, unbelting his sword as he announced his text; Robert Strawbridge, of

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Maryland, lay preachers on whom rested the tongue of flame,—they and those they wakened laid the foundations of the faith along the Atlantic Coast from the Hudson to the Chesapeake. And with them were such other laymen as Paul and Barbara Heck, Richard Bassett, member of the convention that framed the Constitution of the United States, governor of Delaware, active Methodist, in whose house Coke and Whatcoat came on the Saturday before the Sunday on which Coke and Asbury met for the first time; Judge Philip Bassett, ancestor of a long line of eminent Americans, donor of Bassett's Chapel, that fountain-head of Methodism in Maryland, the humble but powerful patron of the young societies. Such men as these bore along the Methodist move-

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ment in this New World. But were they allowed to participate in the legislation and general business of the nascent society? When the Methodist Episcopal Church was formally organized at the Christmas Conference in 1784, no laymen were summoned.

Why? It was due to an accident. It could not have been due to any interpretation of the principles of the young Nation which had been born in 1776 and had won at Yorktown. It was due to the significant fact that John Wesley was bishop in this country as well as in England. As late as 1790 the Minutes ask the question, "Who are the persons that exercise the episcopal office in the Methodist Church in Europe and America? Answer: John Wesley, Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury."

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John Wesley was one of the great characters of all time. He was a mystic. He was fascinated by the sermons of Tauler, that troubadour of the presence of Christ, whilst yet in Oxford; he was fascinated by the mystic doctrines and symbols of interior religion, the supremacy of love, of illumination, of the conquest of self; he was even then "strongly persuaded in favor of solitude" and the mystic call "to the desert." Few men have ever lived whose study of the mystics was more wise or profound, whether those of Germany, Flanders, France, Italy, or Spain. There were multiplied volumes of them in his "literary quarry," the fifty volumes he edited. He declared how to the mystic the soul, filled with the Divine Presence, becomes:

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“A throne of peace: within thine own heart, with His heavenly grace thou mayest look for silence in tumult, solitude in company, light in darkness, vigor in despondency, courage in fear, resistance in temptation, peace in war, and quiet in tribulation.”

On this side of his character Wesley was one of the most amiable and beautiful of Christians. He was courteous, charming; he was venerated and he was loved. When he came from prayer his contemporaries bear witness he had “a serenity that was next to shining.” In his later days, “when he said ‘Good-bye’ his face was as the face of an angel.”

But he was at the same time a statesman and a ruler. The oft-quoted tribute of Macaulay that he

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had a genius for government not inferior to that of Richelieu; the tribute of Sir Leslie Stephen that he was the greatest captain of men of his century—the century of Mirabeau and Pitt and of the French Revolution, if not of Napoleon—seems warranted by the facts. His ability to organize and his ability to command were again illustrated in another member of the Wellesley or Wesley family, who, twenty or more years after John Wesley's death, met and stopped Napoleon at Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington. Some one has said that all great Englishmen have been men of indomitable will. Certainly it was true of Wesley. He believed that the place in which he had been put was the work of the Divine Providence. He did not seek

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to found a new movement; he did not seek its responsibilities; but once they were placed upon his shoulders and the scepter in his hand, he did not think he could put them aside, or even share them, in the last resort, with others. He summoned his workers to a self-denial in which he led the way. He gave them a doctrine of holy living which he himself illustrated and even magnified. If they could not travel with him, let them step aside. Like Hildebrand, Wesley did not seek power; but, like Hildebrand, power being placed in his hand, he wielded it with a grip of steel. Thus on the one side he was the Methodist St. Francis, introspective, sympathetic, providing hospitals, clinics, schools, and all manner of "social service;" and on the

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other, he was the Methodist Loyola, ruling his disciples with an inflexible will.

At the first "Conversation between the preachers" in this country, June, 1773, "the following query was proposed to every preacher:

"Ought not the authority of Mr. Wesley . . . to extend to the preachers and people in America, as well as in Great Britain and Ireland?

"Answer: Yes."

That fixed the status of laymen in the Church in this country, Constitution of the United States or no Constitution of the United States. We have already seen our Methodist Hildebrand's idea of the laity; and without argument or elaboration we know what to expect. The expected happened. The laity were cut out com-

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pletely from the government and general business of the Church. But from the standpoint of American ideas, the expected again happened. The scheme taken over from Mr. Wesley broke down. It was absolutely impossible for a form of government so un-American as the hierarchical theory of Mr. Wesley to continue in this Republic. It gave way—at least in part.

Early in the last century, as early as 1821, a monthly periodical, the *Wesleyan Repository*, was founded to advocate the admission of laymen to religious assemblies. In 1824 the paper was moved to Baltimore and merged with another periodical, *Mutual Rights*. Immediately the feeling became very bitter. We do not enjoy

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reading the histories of those times. Ministers were expelled or made so uncomfortable that they withdrew. Indeed the bitterness became so intense that when a candidate for admission to the Philadelphia Conference was being considered, a leading member of the Conference arose and said: "Mr. President, I am opposed to the admission of this brother; I am told that he is a lay delegation man, and I had as lief travel with the devil as with a lay delegation man." Such sentiments on the part of the ministry subsided, however, long ago.

In 1840 memorials came to the General Conference asking for lay representation. The body made short shrift of them; they voted that the agitation was directed by "some sin-

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gle intellect" and that there was no "dissatisfaction" in the Church with the existing status.

In 1844 came the disruption of the Church; in 1848 the rehabilitation of the Church after the Southern Exodus.

In 1852 there was a lay convention in favor and another lay convention in opposition to the cause. The General Conference that year declared the matter "inexpedient." In 1856 the same attitude was resumed.

In 1860 for the first time a standing committee was raised. During that quadrennium a resolution was sent through the Annual Conferences to test their attitude. It was snowed under. Nearly a hundred and fifty Quarterly Conferences voted on the proposition, but here the laity were

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about evenly divided. But the acorn was now in the soil; the oak was now inevitable. The General Conference took formal action directing that the Annual Conferences should provide for a referendum vote of the laymen during the year 1861. The General Conference adopted the report presented by Davis W. Clark and seconded by Morris D'C. Crawford that the "General Conference . . . approve of the introduction of lay representation into this body when it shall be ascertained that the Church desires it." When the vote of the laity was tabulated it was found, strangely enough, that it stood 47,885 *against*, to 28,884 *for*.

This brings up the fact which should always be had in memory, that the champions for lay representation

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were generally among the ministry, whilst the greatest antagonists were laymen. The greatest antagonist of all was the layman Dr. Thomas E. Bond, twice editor of *The Christian Advocate*, who held that a divine right of government inhered in the ministry—a doctrine we have analyzed above.

It was at this time that a leader entered the lists, one blast upon whose trumpet was worth a thousand men, Bishop Matthew Simpson. We have already quoted from him. On that occasion (May 13, 1863) he said:

“Had I my brethren of the ministry here to-day, as I have taken the liberty to counsel you on the one hand, I would counsel them on the other. I would say to them, Why intimate that there is any danger to arise from in-

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roducing the laity into the general council of the Church? Why is it? Is it because the laity have not wisdom enough to plan general measures? That can not be. Is it because the laity do not love the Church? We were all laymen once. I know I loved the Church just as dearly before she set me apart for her ministry as I ever have since, and I believe our lay brethren love the Church. Is it said that our itinerancy is in danger, or anything else in danger from them? Why so? How have they learned their attachment to Methodism? It was through the influence of gospel teachings. What a commentary will it be upon our labors, if, after one hundred years of toil in this country, we have not been able to gather a laity together who love the economy of our Church! It seems to me it would be a reproach upon our labors to say so.”

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In that same address Bishop Simpson called attention to a situation in Methodism which seemed to him so grave that he laid the utmost stress upon it. As the reader pursues the bishop's thought he can but project before his mind the situation in our own Church at this moment; because, in fact, what are the lay associations which are organized in so many Conferences but a form of authorized convention? Bishop Simpson said:

“There is another reason why I favor lay representation that may seem a little novel at first to you. It is this—I favor lay representation because I am opposed to conventions. It has been said that conventions are dangerous. I admit their danger. There is danger in all irregular action. There are sometimes words uttered and there may be acts performed

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that are not in harmony precisely with the spirit of our institutions. But how are they to be prevented? May I ask these, my brethren, and through them, friends who possibly may hear, has it occurred to you there never has been a call, so far as I know, for a convention of the people of the Protestant Episcopal Church? I have never heard of a call for a convention of Baptist laymen in this country. I have never heard of the calling of a convention of Presbyterian laymen in this country; I have never heard of the calling of a convention of laymen in any Church that I know of in the United States except in the Methodist Church. But we have had our conventions—we have had them from the beginning of the century every now and then. Conventions in the days of radicalism, conventions in the days of ‘Scottism’ (I use the expression simply as expressive), conventions of

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anti-slavery men, conventions of this and that form. Why is it? Simply, as I understand it, because there is no other way in which the laymen can give expression to their views. [Applause.] Why is it that other Protestant Churches have not had these conventions? They have laymen associated in council with the ministry, and they can express their views so that there is no need of their going outside to do so, and they do not go outside. But when an excitement arises and a question comes up in our Church, either the laymen must keep silence or they must go outside to discuss it. So long as the present order of things continues we are perpetuating conventions in the Church. And instead of being opposed to conventions, by opposing lay delegation, I think I destroy the necessity of conventions altogether by saying to the laymen, 'Come inside and counsel with

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us, and let us act together and not separately.' ” [Applause.]

We do not believe we can do the cause of lay participation in the Annual Conference *business* a greater service than to print the closing paragraphs of Bishop Simpson's address. The congregation was spellbound. The speaker seemed oppressed by the sense of what the hour might mean. He was oppressed also with the weight of his own belief in lay participation in the *business* of the Church. He exclaimed:

“Allow me a word or two personally. I had thought upon this subject for years; I had looked over it until my mind was satisfied, and I expressed it to my most intimate friends that lay representation was the greatest want of the Church. As you know, I went

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abroad a few years ago, and was taken ill. I doubted whether I should get home. I reached my home, however, and lay sick for a length of time, on a bed from which my friends thought I would never rise. I looked over the Church. I determined, God helping me, if I had strength enough before the dying moment came to issue an address to the Church on this question of lay representation. I went so far as to prepare the outlines of it, designing to have it filled up while I had sufficient strength. God was pleased in His mercy to spare me a little longer to my family. I was raised again from my bed of sickness. I laid the matter aside, waiting until in the providence of God there should be occasion for it, and I said no more. I crossed the Rocky Mountains last summer, after having had a very sudden and severe attack, which my friends feared would terminate my

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usefulness and active labor. I found myself in traveling exposed to danger and disease, and I knew not whether I should return or not. While on that Pacific Coast, I resolved to send back to the Church papers of our denomination the declaration that I believed that lay representation was needed for the benefit of our Church. [Applause.]

“I did it, sir, for the purpose of putting myself on the record, and if I had aught of influence among my friends, to say to them, if I never should have a chance of speaking to them personally again, ‘If you wish for the unity, the prosperity, and the perpetuity of our Church, admit lay representation.’ Well, sir, I am here among you, spared, in the providence of God, to labor a little longer, with health in which I am able to do something more for the Church, whether it shall please the Church to keep me

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where I am or to use me in any other way. In my youth I gave myself to that Church in a covenant never to be forgotten. God helping me, I shall live for that Church, and tell it what I think best for it, according to the light given to me, as long as God lets me live." [Amen.]

This was in 1863. The General Conference of the following year passed this:

"Resolved, That while we reaffirm our approval of lay representation in the General Conference, whenever it shall be ascertained that the Church desires it, we see no such declaration of the popular will as to justify us in taking advanced action in relation to it."

In 1868 a laymen's convention was held in Chicago, seat of the General Conference of that year. The con-

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vention prepared a memorial, which was signed by General Clinton B. Fisk, chairman; Governor John Evans, Colorado; Isaac Rich, William Claflin, Franklin Rand, Boston; Oliver Hoyt, Stamford, Conn.; Lemuel Bangs, New York; Amos Shinkle, Covington, and thirty others. It contained this language to the General Conference:

“You dispose absolutely of all donations, bequests, and grants made for benevolent purposes to the Church, your trustees merely holding such property subject to your order. This General Conference is, therefore, sole legatee and grantee in all such cases. You can also exercise discretion as to the length of the pastoral term. . . . You require of us a pledge to support the ministry, by which is, of course, meant the pastors duly appointed. In

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all this the laity is merely passive. Does it not appear to you that a General Conference making such requirements of and laying such commands upon the laity should be composed in part of lay delegates? The exercise of such large power is, no doubt, necessary; but it would come more appropriately from a General Conference in which the ministry and laity are jointly represented."

The General Conference of 1868 voted to submit the question both to the Annual Conferences and to the adult lay membership of the connexion; the vote of the General Conference was 227 for, to 3 against, lay delegation. The vote in the Conferences was far more favorable than among the laymen themselves. It was the strong ministerial vote in favor that carried the day. The *Western*

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Christian Advocate under John M. Reid, the *Northwestern* under Thomas M. Eddy, *Zion's Herald* under Gilbert Haven, and especially *The Methodist*, edited by the mighty George R. Crooks, spoke in ringing words for the reform. Two hundred and fifty thousand tracts were distributed on the eve of the popular vote. Bishop Simpson wrote with a prophet's vision to Bishop Ames:

“I feel an intense interest in the subject, growing out of the attitude of the Church South. If we are to have a union with other Methodist bodies, it can only be on the basis of admitting the lay element as they all have it.”

Prophetic words. It may be worth while to keep them in mind.

Between 1868 and 1872 the Church

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changed front. Up to and into the General Conference in 1872 the laymen made their appearance; they were brought in by the preponderating favorable vote of the ministry: they quietly took their seats by their ministerial brethren: and, as Dr. Crooks, in his "Life of Bishop Simpson," observes, "the heavens did not fall."

CHAPTER VI

WHAT IS THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE?

THIS writer may be permitted to say that in the scores of communications of various kinds which have come to him from pastors upon this subject during recent months, scarcely any minister has based the exclusion of the laity from the Annual Conference upon any theory of the divine right of the clergy to govern. As a matter of fact, that objection is negligible. Nor have there been any more than three or four who have found their ground for such exclusion in the fact that it is a surrender of power on the part of the ministry. That is not an impediment. It goes deeper.

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The objection to laymen in the Annual Conference is of another character. It is said that the Annual Conference is not a legislative body; it is not endowed with the right to make laws; it is not a court to pass on the validity of legislation. Its functions are simply to hear the reports of the ministers, pass upon the qualifications of candidates for the ministry, conduct the examinations of the various classes of young ministers on their way through their studies, hear the reports of the Conference stewards on necessitous cases, conduct the services of ordination, hear sundry reports, get the appointments, and depart for the year's work in the itinerancy. This routine, we are told, is ministerial in its essence; it does not concern the laity; it has no legislation;

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and therefore it could not and would not interest laymen if they were legally admitted to membership. It would be dull to them. They would not attend. It would be a waste of energy, and would accomplish nothing.

For it is not to be expected that laymen would take any part in matters involving ministerial relations.

In a large degree this is both true and just. The picture is correct. But: it is not complete.

What to-day is an Annual Conference? Is it simply a mechanical routine of a given number of ecclesiastical inquisitions: Who are admitted on trial? Who are in studies of the third year? Who are the superannuates? Who have been received by transfer? Who have been located at their own

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request? Who have been received on credentials? etc.

If it be answered that this is all there is to an Annual Conference, the instant reply is, Is this all there ought to be to an Annual Conference? For the Methodist Episcopal Church in its annual gatherings for conference—the Methodist Episcopal Church representing in fact and by affiliation ten million people in this land—is it enough, is it all that is required, that a class in the Church shall meet, ask those questions, and adjourn? Are there no real problems that the Methodist Episcopal Church as a Church, ministers and laymen counseling together, ought to “confer” upon? Is *the Church* as such to stand aloof from such ques-

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tions as temperance, education, foreign missions, the rural Church, hospitals, "social service," Church and other literature, the race problem, the place of the child, the Sunday school, the peril of immigration, the conquest of the frontier, Mormonism, Sabbath observance, child labor, our colleges, divorce, cities, and a score of other burning questions which are agitating and ought to agitate all Churches to-day? Suppose we wish to get the ministers and laymen together for a "conference" say on the stupendous task of foreign missions—how do we do it? Do we not have to organize a *convention*? Really, has not the Methodist Church rather gone to seed on conventions? Can we keep the big convention plan of touching the

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Church up indefinitely? The fact is, the program of conventions is pretty nearly ready for its epitaph.

When we compute our millions in membership, when we compute also our per capita gifts to the Church's interests, and our conditions in the great cities, in brief the status of the Church, is it not permissible and even urgent to ask the Methodist Episcopal Church if she is satisfied with the returns on her assets, if she thinks she is getting enough out of her members and the investment of her capital? It is our belief that the defects, the lack of interest, the lack of actual organization, the lack of returns, might in good measure be obviated if all the hundred Annual Conferences throughout this land were yearly conferences of the Church, instead of a

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somewhat repetitious and formal conference of a class in the Church. The ministry is not all the Church. It is the glory of the Church. It has and still will have the great prophetic leadership of the Church. Nothing but suicide can ever take away that crown. But the laity, too, are the Church. They have their priesthood, their place in God's plan, not as slaves, not as subjects, but as the common children, partners, fellow workers and "fellow gladiators," as the apostle phrased it, with a divided responsibility, in the one Body of Christ. There can be no difference of opinion as to the principles here stated, although there may still remain a doubt as to the plan of the layman in the "Conference."

As a matter of fact, have we de-

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scribed the Annual Conference correctly in confining it to the thirty questions in the Discipline? Here we make an appeal to fact. The Rock River Conference Journal for 1911 lies before us. Forty-eight pages of the Journal are given to reports of Committees on:

Jails and Prisons,
Marriage and Divorce,
Old People's Home,
Conference Deaconess Work,
Periodicals,
Sabbath Observance,
Foreign Missions,
Northwestern University,
Superannuates' Relief,
Social Service,
Civil and Religious Liberty,
Epworth League,
Wesley Hospital,
Temperance,

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The Bible Cause,
Garrett Biblical Institute,
Chicago Training School,
Education,
Woman's Foreign Missions,
Woman's Home Missions,
Chicago Missions,
Freedmen's Schools,
Domestic Missions,
Romanism.

The Illinois Conference Journal shows practically the same list, but adds a thoroughgoing report on Evangelism, History Illinois Methodism, Mattoon Memorial Hospital, White Slave Traffic, Methodist Students in State Universities, and almost overshadowing all, the launching of a campaign for \$1,250,000 for the five educational institutions within her borders. Both of these citations are

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merely examples; they are not exceptional.

Are not these vast questions a part of the Annual Conference? Have not the preachers "conferred" upon them as well as on the thirty questions in the Discipline? The fact is, the Annual Conference of to-day consists of two functions: first, the asking of the Disciplinary questions; second, the consideration of whatever subject is of such a character as to deserve the attention and deliverance of a great Christian society.

It is not a correct report of existing conditions to say that the Annual Conference convenes simply to ask and answer the ancient routine of the Discipline. The question is of whom shall these other questions be asked? Who shall declare the attitude of the

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people on all the questions enumerated above? Is that function to be invested wholly and alone in the clergy? A moment's reflection will show that that is unwise and that it is impossible. The framing of resolutions on temperance, on divorce, on the white slave traffic, are intended to voice the attitude of the Church, not of the clergy simply; and as such they are in fact legislation, whatever we may say to avoid the word. And the fact that laymen have been admitted to the supreme legislative body of the Church carries with it the implication that, if the Annual Conference is to assume to discuss and vote upon resolutions in the nature of defining the attitude of the Conference—the Churches and the people in them—on any question, the laity should par-

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ticipate in the voting which makes the resolution obligatory.

It does not end here. May we be permitted to use a concrete illustration? At a Woman's Foreign Missionary Anniversary within the year, Mrs. Bishop Bashford was present and made a thrilling address. Really, was not that a part of the Conference in its wider horizons and inclusions? Or if it was not, in reality ought not that momentous afternoon to have been considered one element, one paragraph in the vast story of the week? In fact, are not the Conference anniversaries a part of the week, a part of the Conference purpose? If they are not, if only the inquisitions of the Disciplinary routine are the Conference and the rest are the camp followers and outside though related at-

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tractions, must it not be said that in some particulars at least, the side shows are more memorable, if not more vital, than the main tent?

Our theory of the Methodist Episcopal Church is that of a vast organism, millions strong, rich, poor, learned, unlearned, patriots, neighbors, Christians, going its way across the years, mighty because it is consecrated, alive to the mother land and to lands across the seas, conceiving of humanity as a brotherhood, and opening its eyes to how vast is its opportunity and its responsibility, and then getting together in its hundred groups throughout the mother land, and having a "Conference" on how that opportunity may be thoroughly realized and that responsibility actually and faithfully met. On such a

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theory the coming together of a small fraction of the Church and that fraction a distinct class, no matter how consecrated or how high its character, is simply, in the nature of the case, not sufficient.

Our theory of the Annual Conference is that once a year *the Church* should confer, ministers and laymen, together on the issues that the CHURCH should confer upon. We beg to submit the question: Is it not possible that it would be profitable to the Kingdom of God?

CHAPTER VII

AT THE SEAT OF CONFERENCE

LAYMEN are seeking avenues for self-expression. In all denominations they are astir. They are not content to be a religious monad; they will not live the unrelated and somnolescent life. The whole world is a complex of connections, piece work, in which all for each and each for all is now the economic and political and religious ideal. The laymen are swept together in the vital currents of the times.

Every great outburst of religious power has been accompanied by the fresh outburst of lay energy. All revivals are marked with Pentecosts

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poured upon the laity. We would expect it to be so, we who believe in the priesthood of the laity; and so the historian finds it to be. In the day of the apostles it was so; this needs no citation of proof: the "company" "were *all* filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the Word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul—" *one* in the energizing impulse of the Spirit, given according to his measure to each disciple.

The experience of Christendom has repeatedly reiterated the proposition: the outburst at the rise of Monasticism, the outburst during the life of Francis of Asissi, are types of that outburst of lay activity which, for example, burst through the conventional restraints of the Church, when, cen-

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turies later, Wesley and Whitefield preached from Cornwall to the Tyne.

It is one of the heartening signs of a spiritual revival that the laity in our day are seeking to express themselves for Christ. Nor are they seeking new machinery. It will be observed that neither the Laymen and Religion Movement nor the Laymen's Missionary Movement wish to create any new societies. They expressly state as much. They are not a new *machine*; they are a *movement*. Is it not a good sign? It is a proof that the Son is in the midst of His brethren and that they hear His voice.

If illustrations were needed of this, it would only be necessary to trace the origin and growth of what has been called "The Uprising of Men for World Conquest," the beginning and

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progress of the Laymen's Missionary Movement, or that uprising of men for Christian work in America—the Men and Religion Movement. These activities may have been too optimistic; they may be open to a certain amount of candid criticism; but a reading of the names of the persons connected with them, men usually supposed to be buried under their secularities, professional men, politicians, scholars, business men, shows how there is an increasing company of laymen who are seeking to express themselves for Christ, making it now a part of their life creed to work in the Church, for the Church, with the Church, if only they may find the open door. Whatever may be said in criticism of any phase, or any person, or of any lack of response in any

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quarter, it remains that these are spiritual phenomena; and they are heartening signs of the times.

This *movement* is visible in the Methodist Episcopal Church. There is a desire on the part of the laity for a larger work in the Church. In the nature of things this can not be satisfied, and ought not to be satisfied with lay membership in the General Conference. General Conference comes but once in four years. And there is a maximum of only four hundred out of three and a half million laymen possible in that body. It is impossible that eligibility merely to membership (there is practically no chance of actual membership) in a quadrennial body can, or ought to, satisfy any genuine desire to participate in the large work of the Church. In conse-

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quence of this feeling, a few years ago laymen's associations began to spring up. These associations generally met at the seat of the Annual Conference, and whilst it was in session. The Lay Electoral Conferences, meeting once in four years, passed resolutions favoring such associations. The Laymen's Association of the Holston Conference is the type of what was the goal of these associations. This group of laymen in Tennessee organized with the intention of seeing to it that every benevolent apportionment in every charge was met in full, and that every pastor's "salary" was paid in full. It also undertook to assist in financing the official institution of learning, now the University of Chattanooga, and this also it did. The Laymen's Associations of the South Kansas, Illinois,

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Colorado, Rock River, Troy, California, Northwest Iowa, Newark, Detroit Conferences were early in the lists and have become a power. The General Conference of 1908, in Baltimore, took this action:

LAYMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS

¶ 88. There may be assembled at the seat of the Annual Conference a Laymen's Association organized within the bounds of the Conference, composed of delegates selected from the charges in such manner as the Laymen's Association may determine. The purpose of such Association shall be to advance the local and Conference interests of the Church and to enlist all laymen in the general activities of the denomination.

The year before the General Conference gave this sanction there were

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already twenty-nine such associations, the year following the granting of the sanction the number increased to forty-eight; in 1911 the number reported was fifty-five.

What does this mean? It can only mean that the laity of fifty-five Conferences are on record as having found in themselves a will to meet and consult and work for the large interests of the Kingdom. And these actual figures are but symptomatic of the rising tides of responsibility and devotion passing over the laymen of the age. They want something beyond perfunctory Church membership, indolence, dress parade, taking the collection, drawing checks. They want to know; they want to get into the game; they want a place to work. Methodist laymen are like the laymen

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of other denominations. They are units in the age *movement*.

Observe: the Lay Associations meet at the seat of the Annual Conference. What can it but mean in the inevitable to-morrow to have the laymen meeting in a borrowed church at the seat of the Conference, where the business of the Church is attended to, and they who pay the bills kept out? Can any person discern the signs of the times abroad in the skies and not recognize what it will mean? The Master taught us that certain signs foretold fair weather and that certain signs foretold storms. Go out, thou sleeper, and study the signs in the sky.

The Lay Associations, what are they? They are a convention. The Annual Conference alone has power.

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The Lay Association is the formal register on the part of the laity that it wishes, loyally, to take a part in the business of making the Church a power. It is, then, a sort of half-way house on a district road to a fixed goal. It is a vestibule, as it were, just outside the Annual Conference. Do you expect the kind of men who are working in the Laymen's Associations to be permanently satisfied with the vestibule? Ought they to be satisfied with the vestibule? Is it Scriptural that they should be permanently thus satisfied? Is it best for the Church?

Compare what is going on in the Annual Conference with what is going on at the same moment in the Laymen's Association in some borrowed church: when looked at from the

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standpoint of prestige, subjects, powers, it can excite only sorrow and pain. The contrast is abysmal.

What contact have the laity coming to the Laymen's Association with the Annual Conference? Quite likely at a given hour the pews in the middle of the church will be cleared and a committee of preachers will pilot the laymen down the aisles to the vacated seats. One of the laymen will then deliver a probably extemporaneous talk, sincere but probably superficial, because of no specific preparation, loyal at heart but groping in thought, well received because well meant. The bishop replies, heartily, sincerely, not forgetting in all probability the opportunity to lecture the laity a little. It is over; the solemn procession is re-formed. It marches out. The

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preachers again fill the pews and the business begins again. The laymen march off to the church loaned from the Baptists or Presbyterians, albeit some may linger in the vestibule, outsiders in the Father's house.

Is that for the best interests of the Kingdom? Those laymen ought to be in that board of directors. They ought to speak from the inside.

Will it not come to pass one day that in some form or other, with some rights or responsibilities the laity who form the bone and sinew of the Kingdom, whom faithful pastors have inspired, who are students of our life and will become students of our vast economies and enterprises, will be permitted, yea, will be invited, to sit in the Father's house and confer about the Father's business? Alone we

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stand among the Caucasian Methodisms of earth in denying the millions of our laity a seat beside their pastors in the larger plans for the Kingdom for that inevitable to-morrow that seems so near at hand. The pressure of Providence is against that barred door. The laymen in all denominations are astir. It is a sign of the times. It is impossible for the Methodist Episcopal Church permanently to remain in this particular so far behind all the other bodies of Protestant Christendom.

CHAPTER VIII

WHERE LAYMEN PARTICIPATE

THE experience of others is the compass by which the wise man sails.

It is of importance that in this pending reform in our polity we should ask if there are any other branches of the Methodist family which possess lay participation, in the Annual Conference, and, if so, what the experience of those bodies has been.

In the following bodies laymen are members of the Annual Conference:

METHODIST EPISCOPAL, SOUTH.
METHODIST CHURCH OF CANADA,
METHODIST PROTESTANT,
WESLEYAN METHODIST (Great Britain),

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PRIMITIVE METHODIST (Great Britain),
UNITED METHODIST (Great Britain),
IRISH METHODIST,
INDEPENDENT METHODIST (Great Britain),
SOUTH AFRICAN METHODIST,
AUSTRALIAN METHODIST,
WESLEYAN METHODIST CONNECTION,
FREE METHODIST,
FRENCH METHODIST,
CONGREGATIONAL METHODIST,
WESLEYAN REFORM UNION (Great Britain).

The following body does not permit lay participation in the Annual Conference:

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

It would seem important to inquire concerning the results of this lay participation. Accordingly a letter was addressed to high sources of authority

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asking for confidential information; the letter was addressed to bishops, college presidents, secretaries, editors, distinguished members of the bar, all of them men who have traveled through the world and studied all the phases of this particular subject, whose position gives them a detached viewpoint, and who have written under circumstances so guarded that they could speak without restraint. The letter solicited information as to these points: (1) Has lay membership in the Annual Conference really benefited the Church in particular and as a whole? (2) Has it tended to create "bossism" on the part of the laity? (3) If the question were submitted to the Church to-day, would the Church rescind its former action and in the best interest of the Church withdraw

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the laity from the Conference? Enquiry was made of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the Methodist Protestant Church, the Methodist Church of Canada, the Wesleyan Methodist Church (of Great Britain), the Irish Methodist Church, the Methodist bodies in Australia, South Africa, France.

The following replies are types of all the letters we received:

THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the status of the laity in the Annual Conference is precisely this:

1. Laymen were admitted in 1866 by action of the General Conference of that year, which was duly confirmed by the Annual Conferences im-

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mediately following, as a constitutional question was involved.

2. Very slight change has been made in the language of the original action, which read, "one-fourth of whom may be local preachers," and which was substituted in 1878 by—"Of the lay members from an Annual Conference, one may be a local preacher."

3. In 1870 it was provided that the lay delegates to an Annual Conference (always four from each presiding elder's district) should be "chosen by the District Conferences," while in 1866 the original provision was that the four should be "chosen annually by the district stewards, or in such other way as the Annual Conference may direct." In 1870 the provision was inserted concerning choosing lay delegates to an Annual Conference, that they should choose only such as were twenty-five years of age at least,

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and had been for six years next preceding his election a member of the Church. This was later changed to "our Church."

REPLIES.

I do not suppose that there is a man among us who would even think of doing away with it. It is possible that in some instances the delegates have made an improper use of their position. If so, however, I am not aware of the fact. On the contrary, they have been a great addition to the life and working efficiency of the Conferences. The fellowship between them and the ministers has been increasingly free and affectionate. All the indications are that the next movement among us will be in the direction of equal representation. At the present, as you are doubtless aware, there are only four delegates from each district.

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Apart from all questions of expediency, we are thoroughly convinced from the study of the Scriptures that laymen have a fundamental right to a full share in the government and administration of the Church. Any other view seems to us to have in it at least a lingering remnant of mediævalism.

—ALPHA.

The policy of lay representation in the Annual and the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, has worked so well from the very beginning that it would be impossible to work up among us a discussion of the question.

Lay representation, in supplying a certain element in a Church which leans to militarism, promotes a democratic unity which binds the laity in feeling and action more closely and sympathetically to our Conferences.

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Lay representation acts as a balance-wheel to a legislative machinery which may develop a practical speed too great for safety. In other words, the layman is a check against bossism and that "pernicious activity" which may obtain even among the saints. The clerical and lay elements act as counter-checks.

Lay representation gives to the clerical element the advantages of that broad, practical business influence which comes from the layman's world. The value of the layman as a member of the various Conference boards is very manifest.

The presence of the layman in our Conferences adds interest and usefulness to the sessions.

No; we have become so accustomed to the layman as a valued factor in our Conference work that we do not see how we could very well afford to be without him.

—BETA.

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The presence of laymen in our Annual Conferences is a positive restraint upon both politics and bossism, whether of the ministry or of the laity itself. The membership of laymen in our Annual Conferences I believe to be of much benefit (1) in receiving their co-operation along the business and financial lines of the local Church. (2) In sharing with them the responsibility of the appointments by having them on the ground and in frank conference with bishop and cabinet. (3) In breaking down the ecclesiastical bars and traditions of separateness that came in with Anglican ministerial caste from the days of Wesley.

I doubt if you can find a body of laymen in all Methodism more interested than ours in the work of the Church locally and connectionally, or more helpful to their pastors. I think such loyalty dates back to the past

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and confidence expressed in them by the act of full and free admission to all our councils. —GAMMA.

1. It gives the Conference the benefit of *the point of view* of the class of people who constitute the mass of Church membership.

2. It gives the advantage of the business methods, habits, and experience of the men whose business *is* business. This is no small advantage. It keeps the preacher from onesidedness and narrowness.

3. It reacts on the laymen to *their* advantage to be trusted in the privilege of participating in the business of the Church as represented in an Annual Conference, and tends to make them take more interest in the Church and to be better men.

4. It increases the respect of the preachers for their lay brethren and the lay people to find them as inter-

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ested in the broader work of the whole Conference and the whole Church as themselves and as competent to participate in it, and thus gives them an added motive for doing their best work for their people. —DELTA.

Thus far our experience with the laymen has been entirely satisfactory. I know of no "bossism" or "ecclesiastical politics" among them. Their presence has been a "distinct and definite advantage."

The grounds of my belief in their membership in the Annual Conference are (1) the general view of the "priesthood" of *all* believers; (2) the growing interest among the laymen in the life and work of the Church; (3) the increasing need of their service as the demands upon the Church are multiplied and become more urgent.

These, in brief, are my reasons for favoring lay membership in our Conferences. —EPSILON.

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I feel perfectly sure that it has not tended to increase what is called ecclesiastical politics. It encourages, on the other hand, a sense of responsibility on the part of the laymen for the things the Annual Conferences do, and begets a more intelligent spirit of co-operation with the minister in his work. The Church exists for the layman, and one way of helping him to forward the general interests of the Church is to give him an active share in its deliberations. I think, moreover, that it can be safely said that the lay members do not bother the bishops about special appointments.

—ZETA.

I speak as a layman. I have never known any discord to grow out of lay membership in the Annual Conference, and I am of the opinion that the appointments are more satisfactory and the spirit of the body and the

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Church better because of their presence. Their presence does not tend to increase what is called ecclesiastical politics or bossism on the part of the laity. I can not say that it is a distinct and definite advantage, except that perhaps laymen feel that they have a right to be heard if they wish to be heard, and that tends to make them better satisfied.

But the Annual Conference is a ministers' conference and always will be, and in my opinion ought to be. It is the time when ministerial character is investigated, and when their abilities and adaptabilities for work are held in the balance, and determined by an arbiter who gives them their commission for another year. Under the law of our Church a layman can not vote on any question involving ministerial character, and while that is a fact and has been a limitation upon my power as a member of the

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Annual Conference that I have always been alert not to transgress, yet it is a limitation that I have never known any minister to speak of publicly in an Annual Conference. By a quiet acquiescence, that has been thoroughly quiet and that has been almost unobservable, the laymen have fallen in agreeably with the accepted idea that an Annual Conference is a ministers' conference. There has never been any discord or friction of any kind, so far as I have known, as a result of laymen in Annual Conferences. The ministers are satisfied, and so are the laymen. Their presence is often helpful because with us the presiding elder is a representative both of the Churches and of the ministers, and when he is in doubt about an appointment the laymen, officially chosen, are on hand to be consulted by him, and sometimes the bishop himself sends for one of them and talks

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over the situation in some town or in some district. But to say that there is any politics or any bossism on the part of the laity is to speak of an imaginary thing, at least of a thing that I know nothing about, and have never heard such an expression used in one of our Conferences.

In my opinion the laymen's conference for our Church is the District Conference. I have long contended, and am contending more now than ever before, that a District Conference ought to be made up almost entirely of laymen, and that they ought to be placed in charge of nearly all of its deliberations, lead the discussions, and make the plans for the work of the district. That is their distinct body, and in my opinion, as the years grow it is going to be more and more their Conference.

Of course, with us the General Conference is a ministers' and a laymen's

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Conference equally, and it is a very rare thing that any one can observe the deliberations of a General Conference and observe any line of sentiment held by either order that is in conflict with the line of sentiment held by the other.

I am inclined to the view that the presence of laymen in an Annual Conference tends to remove friction between the two orders and to bring about a better feeling of satisfaction and acquiescence of the ministers and laymen in the appointments and in the work done. As I see it, it is largely a question of practical administration. There is no reason for the ministers to mistrust the laymen, and no reason for the laymen to mistrust the ministers. If any such a mistrust exists, the best way, in my opinion, to remove it is simply to put laymen in a place where they can be heard, and when that is done the ministers will

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find that the complaints that they now think exist will entirely dissipate themselves.

The most valuable work that our laymen render is on committees. On the Committee of Education they are nearly always the most practical advisers, and that is true of some other committees. I have known many a minister who went into a committee with certain enthusiastic views that was persuaded, after his propositions were brought face to face to some practical men, that they had a better understanding of the real situation than he had.

—THETA.

THE METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH.

REPLY.

The presence of laymen in our Annual Conferences exercises a conservative influence on legislation generally. I do not believe that it develops

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a tendency to ecclesiastical politics or "bossism." The Churches seldom send up the same lay representatives to the Annual Conferences. Consequently they do not become sufficiently familiar with Conference business to exert a directing or dominating influence. On the contrary, they act as a sort of balance-wheel to check what would seem to them to be too radical departure from the established methods of Church work, or too excessive domination on the part of individual ministerial members of the Annual Conference. It is very rarely, indeed, that laymen exercise a positive and aggressive leadership in Conference affairs; ordinarily they do not have the opportunity to become sufficiently versed in the business of the Conference to give them the confidence and self-assurance necessary to do this.

I believe, however, that the pres-

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ence of the laymen in the Annual Conference brings a decided advantage to the Church. They are thus enabled to come into intelligent touch and sympathy with the work of the Church in a way they could not do if they did not have the opportunity of sharing in Annual Conference legislation. They are brought into a position where they can co-operate efficiently in carrying out plans of Church work. As a matter of fact, experience proves that the responsibility of leadership in formulating and in executing plans for the development of Church interests generally falls upon the ministerial members of the Annual Conference. The sound common-sense and clear judgment of laymen often give a practical turn to the plans devised for Church work, that might, but for their presence, become too theoretical for successful results. —IOTA.

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THE METHODIST CHURCH OF CANADA.

This denomination has had full lay representation in all its Conferences, General and Annual, as well as in its District Meetings and, of course, in its Quarterly Official Meetings, since the General Union of Methodism in 1883.

REPLIES.

I think I can say, without any hesitation, that it has proved a distinct and definite advantage to our Church. In the first place, it tends to increase very largely the interest which our leading laymen take in all the affairs of the Church, especially in its missionary and educational enterprises. In the second place, it has introduced into all the business of our Church better business methods. I do not mean by that the hardness of ordi-

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nary commercialism, but thoroughness and accuracy and attention to details in such a way as to obtain financial security. In the third place, it has organized our Church for all its financial efforts, so that missionary work, educational work, the support of our ministry and the care for our aged ministers and widows have the co-operation and support and business ability of our best men. Again, on our circuits it relieves our ministers of a good deal of the secular side of Church management, which in days that I can remember, as I have been for over fifty years a Methodist minister, occupied a good deal of the time and energy of our ministry, especially in the country districts. When our business men know that they will come up first to our District Meeting, and then to the Annual Conference, at the end of every year presenting the financial reports of their districts and

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circuits, under the criticism of clear-headed business men from all parts of the province, you will see that it is their interest and it becomes their ambition to present a creditable report to their Conference. We have no trouble, I may say, with bossism or political methods to which you refer. We have, it is true, had division of sentiment on various questions, and sometimes more or less canvassing as well as discussion preparatory to the settlement of these questions, but I do not know that this has gone beyond that freedom of discussion and thought and expression of opinion which is necessary under any form of democratic institutions. I think that, perhaps, in giving these reasons for my opinion that lay representation has been to us as a Church of decided advantage, I have answered all your questions, and I may only add with special reference to the Annual Con-

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ferences, to which you more particularly referred that our Annual Conference alone deals with financial returns from our various circuits and stations, and, hence, is the one place where the opinion of the laymen is exercised to the greatest advantage to the connexion as a whole. —KAPPA.

Our polity, you know, is decidedly democratic, while I have been accustomed to think of yours as more monarchical—shall I say, nearer British? Laymen with us have equality of numbers with ministers in General, Annual, and District Conferences, and Quarterly Conferences; so it is no novelty.

In my opinion the presence of laymen in our Annual Conferences is a decided advantage, both to them and to the ministers, and so to the Church at large. In our system we confine certain business, as examination of

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candidates, graduation of ministers, election to orders, to a ministerial session, and this ministerial session is held a day or two before the General Session; so it is sometimes difficult to get the laymen interested in what remains; but for the most part they take an active interest in the committee business and Church enterprises, so they are a help to the people at home.

As to ecclesiastical politics, they are not troublesome. This may result somewhat from our frequent elections and changes of officary; besides, our laymen have the privilege of meeting by themselves during the Annual Conference, and considering and discussing Church interests; this we have found to be a benefit regarding ministers' salaries and the support of colleges, etc. Further, as a rule, they are theologically and Biblically more conservative than some preachers. Not so aerial, speculative, etc. The

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main trouble is, if some of them are rich, high-minded, or, like other rich men, they want their own opinions, schemes, and ways. Plutocracy is no wiser, better, or more generous in the house of God than in the Commonwealth.

Debates in Conference are sometimes benefited by the presence of hard-headed laymen presiding in assemblies. I sometimes find that genuine common-sense, even worldly experience, is worth something. It is true enough that we preachers, with all our learning, all our philosophy, all our theology, all our criticism and idealism are not practical enough for this rugged world. —LAMBDA.

In our Church the matter works out fairly well. I do n't think it could be voted out by either ministers or laymen. To its credit may be placed the following:

WHERE LAYMEN PARTICIPATE

1. It develops a fine spirit of fraternity between ministers and laymen.

2. Laymen bring their business methods, which very greatly helps the work of the Conference.

3. Some of them take quite an active part in the debates, and are quite as useful in committees as the ministers.

4. They have a Laymen's Conference, duly organized, during the Annual Conference session, where they discuss matters pertaining to their interests and report to the Annual Conference the results of their discussion for information.

—OMICRON.

CHAPTER IX

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE CHURCH

“THAT man is right,” said Ibsen, “who stands closest to the future.” The standard, the only standard, by which to measure a proposed alteration is not some yesterday, but yesterday maturing into to-morrow. Principles do not change, nor do their glory and their inspiration; but the application of them may and does, growing out of latent yesterdays into richer, fuller to-morrows. That is the ever present, ever acting law of God. Evolution? What is it but the progressive development of resident forces? Is God in the acorn but not

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in the oak? Methodism is a laymen's movement. The presence of the laity is always among the resident forces in Methodism. God forced it there. Wesley unwillingly let the bulb burst into flower; he allowed the presence and activity of laymen because the pressure of Providence overmastered his disinclination. The laity have been permitted to come to a large participation in legislation for the Church life and polity; but it remains to welcome the laity to a participation in the business Conference of the Church. That is the orb ahead. We follow the gleam.

If this writer might be permitted to ask a favor of those who are interested enough to read this chapter, it would be this: that they hold their criticisms in suspense until they have

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finished the chapter, and then read it the second time, criticising every item in detail. If this writer may be permitted to ask an added favor, it would be that they submit their criticisms to him by mail; he will vastly appreciate it, and, should a second edition of the little book be called for, he may embody their criticisms and suggestions, in summary at least, in an appendix; the Church may then come to an intelligent and definite conclusion on the whole question; then, moreover, we may expect action that will inspire, and not depress, every interest appertaining to the Church, and affecting the Church to the very limits of the earth.

It may now be laid down as a fundamental postulate that there should be, there must be, and sooner or later

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there is certain to be, an Annual Conference of the Church. This has been previously shown to be inevitable.

Let it be assumed that the sessions of the Conference will begin as now, on Wednesday or Thursday—the major Conferences on Wednesday, and each Conference as common sense may indicate. If we treat all the Conferences as beginning on Wednesday, the exceptional instances are such that the same reason which decides that the Annual Conference may begin on Thursday would apply in any condensation of the Conference of the laity. That offers no problem.

On Wednesday, then, the Annual Conference would convene. Both ministerial and lay members would be in attendance. The usual solemn exercises incident to the opening of the

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Annual Conference would be participated in: the Holy Communion, the hymns, Scriptures, and the remarks of the presiding bishop, the addresses of welcome, the response, and all that is incident to the formal beginning of this Annual Conference of the Church.

The organization of the Conference would then proceed, the calling of the roll, the choosing of officers, the fixing of the bar of the Conference, the appointment of the committees, the fixing of the hour of adjournment, speeches, and other business incident to the opening of the session.

In the afternoon might be held the session for the collecting of the statistics and for hearing the reports of the district superintendents. Then might follow adjournment and the meeting of the committees. In the

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evening a session devoted, as now, to anniversaries, with persons designated to preside, and one of the secretaries to put into a paragraph for the Conference Journal a statement of the program.

Thursday morning the Pastoral Session and the Lay Session would meet separately. This involves no parliamentary tangle. Such lay and pastoral sessions meeting simultaneously are provided for at the present moment by one of the most important of the world's Methodist bodies. Of the Methodist Church in Canada we are informed: "We have a Laymen's Conference duly organized during the Annual Conference Session, where they discuss matters and report to the Annual Conference the results of their discussion for information." This

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offers no problem, moreover, since such a session is at present provided for under the name and title of "Laymen's Association." We shall recur to this presently.

THE PASTORAL SESSION.

Most of the Methodist bodies of the world hold such a pastoral session as examines and directs all matters relating to the admission of candidates for the ministry, all examinations, all questions of ministerial character and efficiency, all trials and appeals. It must be plain that this is both logical and proper. The laity in the Quarterly Conference or District Conference recommend the applicant for admission into the traveling ministry; the applicant comes to the door of the Conference and the ministry, through

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various committees, kind but exact and insistent, pass the candidate in review both as to his present intellectual qualifications, his aptness, and his personal life. It examines him through a series of four years of strenuous study; it inquires as to his finances, whether he is in debt so as to seriously embarrass himself [and others]; it prescribes a course of reading; it may place him especially under the charge and eye of the district superintendent; it may recommend that he be left without appointment to attend one of our schools. Thus, when the laity has through the Quarterly Conference nominated the applicant for orders for admission into the traveling connection, the ministry prescribes a course of training for a perfect efficiency, and examines him as is already

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set forth, thus subjecting the candidate to those tests and that discipline which will make him "approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the Word of Truth." Mr. Wesley quotes these solemn words of the apostle: "I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing, to preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering." If the candidate sustains the expectations of the laity which has put him in nomination, if he bends with zest to his studies, if he shows himself faithful as a pastor of the flock, the ministry approves, and admits him into its number. If he shows himself lacking, if it thus becomes evident that

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the laity was mistaken in its recommendation, the ministry, as is its bounden duty, kindly but firmly exercises its power of veto, and the candidate becomes again a member of the Quarterly Conference to exercise such gifts as he may possess in such fields as may open to him.

This is as it should be. This is as it is, with perhaps two or three exceptions, in all the Methodist bodies where laymen sit in the Annual Conference. It may be taken for granted, we sincerely hope, that this will be organically imbedded in the new order by which laymen will take their just and benign place in the Annual Conference of the Church.

Thus organized the pastoral session of the Annual Conference would take up these questions:

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Who have been Received on Trial?

(a) In studies of the First Year.

(b) In studies of the Third Year.

Who have been Continued on Trial?

(a) In studies of the First Year.

(b) In studies of the Second Year.

(c) In studies of the Third Year.

(d) In studies of the Fourth Year.

Who have been Discontinued?

Who have been Admitted into Full Membership?

(a) Elected and ordained Deacons this year.

(b) Elected and ordained Deacons previously.

What Members are in studies of Third Year?

(a) Admitted into Full Membership this year.

(b) Admitted into Full Membership previously.

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What Members are in studies of Fourth Year?

What Members have completed the Conference Course of Study?

(a) Elected and ordained Elders this year.

(b) Elected and ordained Elders previously.

What others have been elected and ordained Deacons?

(a) As Local Preachers.

(b) Under Missionary Rule.

(c) Under Seminary Rule.

What others have been elected and ordained Elders?

(a) As Local Deacons.

(b) Under Missionary Rule.

(c) Under Seminary Rule.

Was the character of each Preacher examined?

Who have been Transferred, and to what Conferences?

Who have been Located at their own request?

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Who have been Located?

Who have Withdrawn?

Who have been permitted to Withdraw under Charges or Complaints?

Who have been Expelled?

What other Personal Notation should be made?

NOTE.—Here enter with adequate statement of facts, the names of, I. Those whose Orders have been recognized without admission to the Annual Conference. II. Those whose Credentials have been restored. III. Those formerly expelled, but now restored by the action of a Judicial or General Conference.

Who are the Supernumerary Preachers?

Who are the Superannuated Preachers?

Who are the Triers of Appeals?

Who have been Received by Transfer, and from what Conferences?

Who have been Readmitted?

NOTE.—Here enter also date of Location and the Conference which granted it.

Who have been Received on Credentials, and from what Churches?

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The Pastoral Session shall have power to hear a complaint against its members, and may try, reprove, suspend, deprive of Ministerial Office and Credentials, expel or acquit any of them against whom charges may be preferred.

The Election and, so far as it is practicable, the Ordination of Elders and Deacons should be done at the Annual Conference.

THE LAY SESSION.

The Lay Session will organize as is customary.

May we be permitted to suggest the formation of a business committee of say two from each district, to whom might be referred any matters the session might wish to refer to it. Among other matters it might prepare in advance, so far as practicable, the program, so as to insure a session of the

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largest profit; and such a committee might prove a valuable time-saver on matters more or less unbalanced, irrelevant, if not trivial, by which the time of the session would be frittered away.

Inasmuch as the formal business of the Business Session will pass the motions relating to the work of the Churches, it is fair to assume that a very important section of the Lay Session will be devoted to the study of conditions and needs of the Church, particularly in the area of the Conference. For our laymen to do this and do it exhaustively and thoroughly, would justify any change in our polity necessary to secure such an end. Let us take a concrete illustration:

Suppose it were fixed that the next Lay Session would take up the two

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questions, "The Church in the Open Country," and "The Church and the Boy;" suppose it should be understood that every member of the next Conference would be expected to read and inwardly digest three little books, "Report of the Commission on Country Life," first published as Senate Document No. 705, 60th Congress, 2d Session, for the use of Congress, which was reprinted by the Spokane Chamber of Commerce for use in the country-life movement in the Northwest; "The Church in the Open Country; a Study of the Church for the Working Farmer," prepared by Dr. Warren H. Wilson for Mission Study Classes under the direction of the Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, and published by the Meth-

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odist Book Concern; and in particular that remarkable little book, "Rural Christendom," by the writing of which Dr. Charles Roads, of the Philadelphia Annual Conference, won the prize of one thousand dollars given by the American Sunday School Union—a book of the highest value—

And suppose it was an expectation amounting to an unwritten law of the Lay Session that its members were expected not only to read these books, but to think through such questions as: What is the proper social service of the country church? How can the Church serve the community as well as individuals? In what should the minister lead? Is it possible to have a really prosperous agricultural community without a Church? What can the Church do as an organizing

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center? Why do so many young people leave the farm for the city? To what extent ought recreation be provided by the Church? Make a list of the wholesome amusements the Church can consistently promote. How, in particular, can the country Church promote patriotism, education, good morals? How can the country Church utilize the work of the agricultural college in "extension classes?" Should the circuit system of pastoral appointments be encouraged? To what extent ought lay preaching be arranged?

And suppose, from the bewildering multitude of books on boy life, the Conference should select just one great little book, "Boy Training," introduced by Ernest Thompson Seton, Chief Scout of the Boy Scouts

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of America, who proposes to have boys trained "to the desolation of our jails," which is edited by that remarkable Young Men's Christian Association worker, John L. Alexander, secretary of the Boy Scouts of America, and the sixteen chapters of which are written by men who know and understand, making the little book worth its weight in gold; and then suppose such questions as these had been pondered along the lines treated in this book: At what age do boys "fall?" What is the relation of the Sunday school to the public school? How can we save the boy? What does psychology have to say about the boy? The boy's temptations in the city, in the country? What are ideal boys' clubs? How can the Bible be made interesting and real to boys? How

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can we encourage the study of nature?
What is our social responsibility to
the adolescent boy?

And suppose one hundred earnest men, laymen who are real factors in the work of their individual Churches, should spend the good part of a day, not in platitudinous, blind-man's-buff of talk that meant nothing anyhow, but in getting down to the bottom of the matter, in these two topics, and then, having passed intelligent and really meritorious resolutions on these topics, should go back to their charges to set in motion the conclusions arrived at, would not a new thrill of power pass through the Churches? Would it not give a fresh meaning to the Sunday school, to the Church in the open country? And these suggested topics for the year's thought,

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and the intense debates, experiences, question drawer of the Lay Session, constitute but one item of the Lay Session. All that is generally or locally associated with our "Laymen's Associations" would still be there.

Moreover, in the two subjects we have taken at random we have not exhausted, we have scarcely hinted at, the list of most profitable considerations for reinvigorating the Churches. May we suggest a few from the long catalogue which instantly occurs to the mind? Suppose for a year the two subjects were "Financing the Church" and "Our Foreign Churches;" suppose, from the shelf of books on tithing, the little book "Gems of Thought on Tithing, by Ministers and Laymen of All Denominations," compiled by George W.

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Brown, and "Our Christian Stewardship," by J. W. Duncan, were taken for this universal reading, and with it our tract literature on systematic giving; suppose the merits of the duplex envelope system were studied, tested, and discussed, with crisp reports of the experiences of the charges; and then, suppose some book like Dr. John R. Mott's "The Decisive Hour in Christian Missions," put forth just after the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh—"the most significant gathering ever held in the interest of the world's evangelization," were read, or, perhaps better, as the first book to be read, Dr. Arthur J. Brown's "The Why and How of Foreign Missions," a book of the most intense interest; what can we imagine the value of this

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by-product of the Lay Session of the Annual Conference would be in thousands of charges throughout the land?

There would remain the hundred no less compelling themes of the polity of Methodism: Ecumenical Methodism; Our Cities; Bible Classes for Men; Personal Recruiting for Souls; Brotherhoods in the Various Churches; What is the Problem of Saving America, and What is Methodism doing to Answer the Problem? Is the "Race Question" becoming more Acute, and What Should the Church Do towards its Solution? The Care of the Worn-out Minister; Church Colleges and State Colleges; Intemperance; Marriage and Divorce; and so on without limit. The subjects given are merely suggestive.

Let us file a caveat, lest the hasty

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reader be led to leap to the conclusion that the Lay Session of the Annual Conference is to be considered as a kind of convention for the hearing of essays. That is precisely what it is not. We have simply named some possible by-products of the Lay Session which will do away with the dear little essays and the irrelevant talk which eats up the time of the Lay Associations with superficialities.

Fundamentally, what the Lay Session does is to incorporate the present Lay Association into the very fabric of the Annual Conference; it fixes the status of the Lay Association, and gives it a tenfold meaning beyond what it has at this moment. All the Lay Association can possibly be is here contemplated, only adding to its efficiency by making it also a great

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training school and parliament where serious laymen will touch the very depths of the genius and destiny of the great Wesleyan principle.

THE BUSINESS SESSION.

We use this name, as it seems necessary. It signifies the high water mark of the Annual Conference of the Church, in comparison with which all else is technique. It would convene Friday morning, with the officers, rules, committees, already constituted at the opening session. In the language of the Discipline: The business of the Business Session would be, in part, to inquire:

Is this Annual Conference incorporated according to the requirement of the Discipline?

Who have died?

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What is the Statistical Report for this year?

What is the aggregate of the Benevolent Collections ordered by the General Conference, as reported by the Conference Treasurer?

What are the claims on the Conference Fund?

What has been received on these claims, and how has it been applied?

What is the amount of the five per cent of collections for the Conference Claimants' Connectional Fund paid by the Treasurer to the Board of Conference Claimants?

Where are the Preachers stationed?

Where shall the next Conference be held?

The Business Session would receive and dispose of the reports of the

Statistical Secretaries,
Conference Treasurer,
Board of Stewards,

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Trustees of the Conference,
Conference Deaconess Board,
Administrators of Trust Funds,
Trustees of Colleges,
Trustees of Hospitals.

There are *sixty-nine* questions in the Discipline relating to these reports.

The Business Session would order, receive, and act upon the reports of the very important standing committees and special committees on

Educational Institutions,
Home Missions,
Foreign Missions,
Bible Cause,
Temperance,
Periodical Literature,
Epworth League,
Peace and Arbitration,
City Extension,
Civil and Religious Liberty,

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Marriage and Divorce,
Domestic Missions,
White Slavery,
Publishing Interests,
Sunday Schools,
Training Schools,
Superannuate Relief,
Woman's Home Missions,
Woman's Foreign Missions,
Sustentation Fund,
State Universities,
Brotherhood Work,
Aid of Freedmen,
Social Service,
Sabbath Observance,
Social Evil.

The Business Session would act on all official appointments and deputations, all officers to be chosen by the Conference, all trustees and committees.

The Business Session would already

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have received the reports of the District Superintendents, giving a close survey of the local societies during the past year; it would be present at the charge of the bishop to the candidates for admission into the itinerant ministry; it would participate in the impressive memorial service.

The Business Session would be in charge of the evening and other anniversaries. From beginning to end there would be an *Annual Conference of the Church*. What is now slurred over would be endowed with dignity. What is voted as an apportionment—but which is in reality a levy—for various causes, would be done by the ministry and laity voting together and be harmonious with republican ideals. In brief, the Business Session would transact all *the business* of the

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Church. And the cumulative advantage of it to the Church in deepening the interest and the consecration of the laity; in emphasizing the brotherhood, the rights, the comradeship, the call to service, of all believers; in promoting lay evangelism, in reviving circuits; in promoting family religion, the love of our literature, the broad vision of the Kingdom; in building the Church of to-morrow upon the unshakable foundation stones of intelligence and shared and felt responsibility reaching everywhere—who can overestimate what it may mean to the coming Kingdom of God?

Finally, it would bring the Methodist Episcopal Church out of her isolation. No longer would she stand aloof from the other Caucasian Methodist bodies of the world, in an em-

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barrassment in which her inherited position excluding her laity unhappily places her. By welcoming her laity to her business conference she would become the true companion of Ecumenical Methodism.

The practical application of the principle of lay membership in the Annual Conference as here projected may fail of adoption; but the principle itself, being shown to be both just and advantageous, can not fail, nor can it be long delayed.

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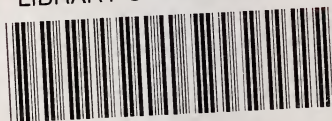
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